



## Lest We Forget

Karen Georgia Thompson  
General Minister and President

March 1 is commemorated annually as [Remembrance Day](#) in the Republic of the Marshall Islands (RMI). Formally known as Nuclear Victims' Day and Nuclear Survivors' Day, this RMI public holiday remembers and honors lives that were lost and disrupted because of the United States nuclear testing which began in RMI in the 1950s. Remembrance Day 2024 marked the 70th anniversary of the Castle Bravo test in the Bikini Atoll, RMI. Bravo was the most powerful weapon ever tested by the United States and was equivalent to 15 million tons of TNT—1,000 times the strength of the Hiroshima bomb.

In acknowledging the International Day for Disarmament and Nonproliferation on March 5th, [the Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights noted the following](#): “Between 1946 and 1958, 67 known nuclear weapons were tested in the Marshall Islands by the United States while it was under United Nations trusteeship. As recognized by the HRC in its resolution 51/35, ‘toxic nuclear waste and nuclear radiation and contamination from decades ago continue to have an adverse impact on the human rights of the people of the Marshall Islands, including persons belonging to displaced communities’ and on a wide range of their human rights, including their rights to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment, to life, health, food, housing, water and their cultural rights.”

In November 2023, I led a World Council of Churches delegation to the Marshall Islands. Our group spent a week on Majuro, listening to stories and concerns, hearing ways our churches can help, and attending Sunday worship. The delegation experienced the visit as a part of the WCC's pilgrimage of justice, reconciliation, and unity, a framework which exemplifies the journey we are on together as member churches with different

challenges and yet held together as the one body of Christ.

During our visits we heard of the many challenges facing these islands because of this nuclear legacy. They include:

- Displacement of the people because of nuclear contamination, and the resulting lack of belonging.
- Health concerns that plagued those who survived the testing and continue for another generation.
- The reliance on processed food and canned food, which creates concerns for the nutrition of all, especially children.
- High incidences of cancer and other illnesses.
- Barriers created by the United States government to access the truth about the testing and the results it had on communities and the land.
- US funds provided over the years are not enough and do not address the long-term challenges faced by those whose lives are affected by the nuclear testing.

Seventy years is a long time for anything and is an even longer time when waiting for change and justice. The testing in RMI was identified as being: [“For the good of mankind and to end all wars.”](#) but it betrayed a cruel disregard for the lives and humanity of people who were deemed expendable and less important than others by the US government. The absence of care and concern 70 years later is a part of the ongoing violation of the human rights of the Marshallese people.

The UCC has an ongoing commitment to continue journeying with our Marshallese siblings in the quest for justice. Our witness for a world where nuclear disarmament is realized must be a priority. We must continue to advocate for the changes we want to see with the Marshallese and other communities where nuclear testing was conducted. This is a part of our commitment as people of faith and followers of Jesus Christ who demanded justice of the oppressors, colonizers, and occupiers of his day.

#### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Rev. Karen Georgia Thompson is the General Minister and President of the United Church of Christ.

LEARN

[ucc.org/justice](http://ucc.org/justice)

DONATE

[ucc.org/donate](http://ucc.org/donate)

ARCHIVE

[bit.ly/witness4justice](http://bit.ly/witness4justice)

*The United Church of Christ has more than 5,000 churches throughout the United States. Rooted in the Christian traditions of congregational governance and covenantal relationships, each UCC setting speaks only for itself and not on behalf of every UCC congregation. UCC members and churches are free to differ on important social issues, even as the UCC remains principally committed to unity in the midst of our diversity.*

